

Before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND
RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FISCAL YEAR 2005 APPROPRIATIONS FOR
THE FOSTER GRANDPARENT PROGRAM

March 23, 2004
10:00 AM

STATEMENT OF:

Brenda Lax, President
National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors
3200 Wayne
Kansas City, MO 64109

INTRODUCTION:

I am honored to testify in support of FY 2005 funding for the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), the oldest and largest of the three programs known collectively as the National Senior Volunteer Corps, which are authorized by Title II of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act (DVSA) of 1973, as amended and administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNS).

Good morning Mr. Chairman. My name is Brenda Lax and I have been the Foster Grandparent Program Director with the City of Kansas City, Missouri for the past 16 years. I am here in my capacity as President of the National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors (NAFGPD). NAFGPD is a membership-supported professional organization whose roster includes the majority of more than 350 directors who administer Foster Grandparent Programs nationwide, as well as local sponsoring agencies and others who value and support the work of FGP.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by thanking you and the distinguished members of the Subcommittee for your steadfast support of the Foster Grandparent Program. No matter what the circumstances, this Subcommittee has always been there to protect the integrity and mission of our programs. Our volunteers and the children they serve across the country are the beneficiaries of your commitment to FGP, and for that we thank you. I also want to acknowledge your outstanding staff for their tireless work and very difficult job they have to “make the numbers fit.” – an increasingly difficult task in this budget environment.

Despite the overwhelming support from you and your colleagues in Congress, however, I am compelled to deliver an unfortunate message about the state of affairs with respect to our programs. As you are well aware, the President’s FY 2005 budget request cuts FGP funding by nearly \$3.5 million (over 3%) on the basis that “some” of our programs are having difficulty recruiting volunteers and meeting volunteer service year (VSY) requirements. This cut is proposed in a year when the CNCS budget request **increased by 9% over the FY’04 level**. David Eisner, the Chief of Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), testified before this subcommittee last week that the rationale for this budget request lies in FGP’s alleged inability to spend all of our appropriated dollars – to the tune of \$3.1 million in 2003. According to CNCS officials, the data on which this number was based was preliminary in nature, and in fact was collected after the FY’05 budget was prepared. Our Association’s own analysis of this same data indicates an underexpenditure of only \$1.3 million (or 1.2%) of the total budget of \$110.775 million. In fact, over 87% of FGP projects either met or exceeded their volunteer goals in 2003. Mr. Chairman, it is important that you and the subcommittee members understand how hard we strive every day to recruit, screen and train FGP volunteers to serve our nation’s neediest children. We value every federal dollar provided for FGP, and work extremely hard to maximize the federal investment in our programs.

NAFGPD feels strongly this proposed cut to our programs represents an extremely shortsighted and counterproductive approach to an issue CNCS has the authority to resolve without damaging programs that are meeting and exceeding expectations. Under current regulation, if an FGP program does not spend out its money in a consecutive 3-year period, that money may be transferred to another program with a waiting list. The point is this budget request punishes **all** FGP programs when all that is needed is fine-tuning in a few. Allow me to provide a few examples of what exactly this budget request will mean for FGP programs in a few select states: In Ohio, 7 out 9 programs who met or exceeded their goals **will lose** \$80,000 in FY’05; In Pennsylvania, despite the fact that all 12 programs successfully spent down all funding, they

will lose over \$151,000; In Florida where only 1 of 12 programs underspent, all 12 *will lose* over \$174,000. The list of innocent programs that will suffer as a result of this cut goes on and on, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, we are extremely concerned that the budget request for FGP reflects a deep misunderstanding on the part of the Corporation of our 350 programs nationwide. To recommend the only federal program specifically targeted to engaging low-income seniors to serve children in their communities be cut when the core mission of our programs is as important as ever, belies a troubling disconnect with our parent agency while CNCS simultaneously requests increases for ***all other existing CNCS programs, and even requested money for new programs.*** All of us recognize the spending constraints placed on the President and, most importantly on you and the Appropriations Committee, Mr. Chairman. However, to propose a cut of this magnitude for FGP in fiscal year 2005 because “some” programs face challenges recruiting is disingenuous and extremely damaging to all of our programs nationwide.

NAFGPD is working tirelessly to stave off this budget request that will cut 1,200 low-income Foster Grandparents and the loss of over 1.2 million hours of mentoring and tutoring to 5,000 children with special needs nationwide. Mr. Chairman, I am here on behalf of 35,000 low-income seniors, the nearly 200,000 children they serve and the countless communities that rely on Foster Grandparents, to request the Committee’s urgent assistance in the FY’05 appropriations process to negate this unwarranted cut that will do long-term damage to our programs.

NAFGPD respectfully requests the subcommittee to provide \$116.729 million for the Foster Grandparent Program in FY 2005, an increase of \$6.608 million over the FY 2004 level. This critical funding will ensure the continued viability of the Foster Grandparent Program, and allow for important expansion of this unique program. Specifically, this proposal would fund a 4% cost of living increase for every Foster Grandparent Program and expansion grants to existing programs that would add 550 new low-income senior volunteers to serve children.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I would like to again thank you for the subcommittee’s support and leadership for FGP over the years. Though I am very sorry to be sitting here with this current budget request, NAFGPD takes great comfort in knowing you and your colleagues in Congress ***do*** appreciate what our low-income senior volunteers accomplish every day in communities across the country. Thank you for this extraordinary opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.